

## John 1:1-18

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. <sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup>The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. <sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

<sup>15</sup>(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")<sup>16</sup>From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup>The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

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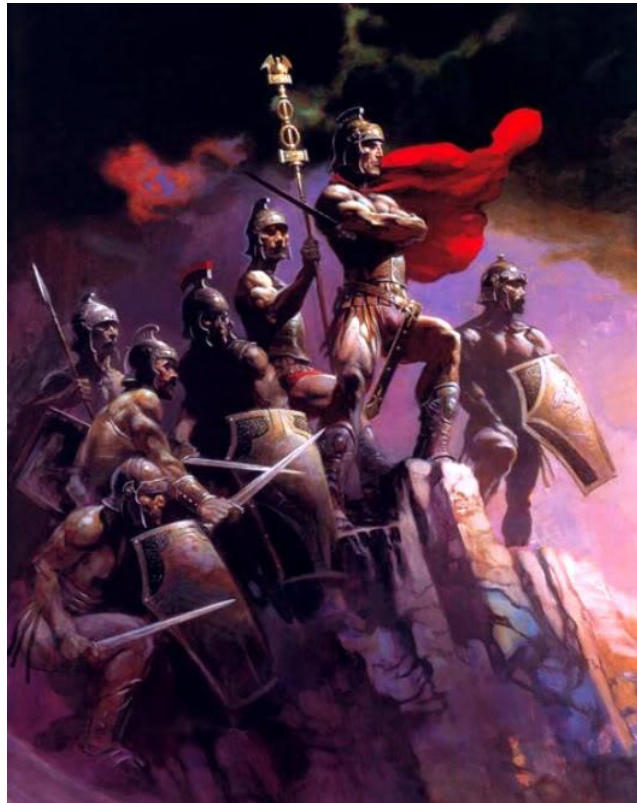
{Have someone turn off the lights on the Christmas tree}



It's hard to imagine a Christmas tree without lights, isn't it?



Or a Christmas Eve service, like last night's without candle light, isn't it? What's Christmas without its lights? It is dark . . . it's cold . . . it's bleak . . . it's not very merry.



First century Israel was a very difficult place to live. Israel was occupied by a cruel oppressor, Rome. They were not free like we are today in the United States. People lived in the shadow of this evil empire, Rome. They lived in fear. They had very little hope of ever being free.



Most of the population was poor with very little opportunity to escape their poverty. If you were born poor, you stayed poor, and your children and their children. They did not have the opportunities we have today in the United States. Perhaps 5% of the population controlled 80% of Israel's wealth; 95% shared 20% of Israel's wealth.

And although we live in the most prosperous country in the world, all is not hunky dory for people living in the United States. 80% of our wealth is controlled by 5% of the population!

There are people who don't feel free. They are shackled to their neighborhoods by poverty or shackled to certain jobs and lifestyles by debt. Some are homeless. Some don't have ready access to education, food, health care and heat. Those who have access have to sacrifice one to access another. They have little hope of they, or their children, rising out of their predicament.

They are physically, psychologically, economically and spiritually depressed. They don't have hope. And not just those who live under the federal poverty level; so many are distressed that they may fall out of the coveted middle class

In the grip of oppression and poverty, the masses of Jewish people had learned to be helpless and powerless over their lives. And many here in the United States feel so trapped in lifestyles they can't afford. They are depressed and stressed, lonely, alienated, stressed to the point of disease. Such an existence is dark and distressed.



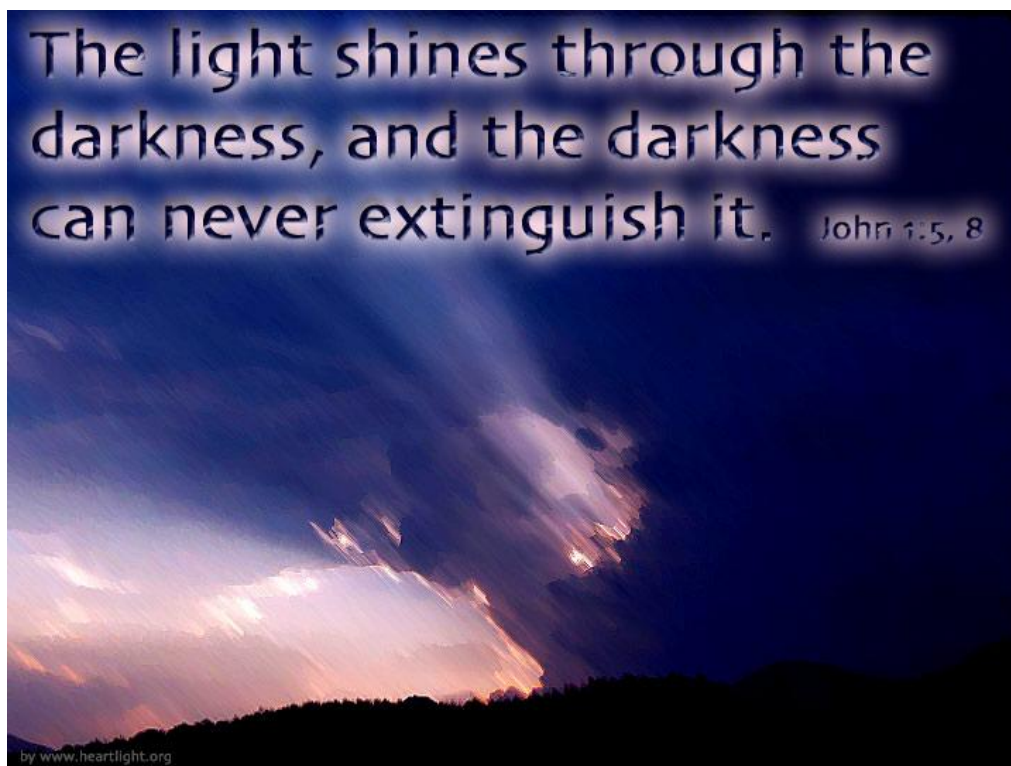
It's like their Christmas tree's unlit. It just isn't right, is it? Can't someone do something about it? Will someone turn on the Christmas tree's lights? {Turn on Christmas lights}.



Jesus came into our world, through the gateway of Israel over 2000 years ago. He came; the Word of God as flesh. He came to bring life to a people near dead from oppression.

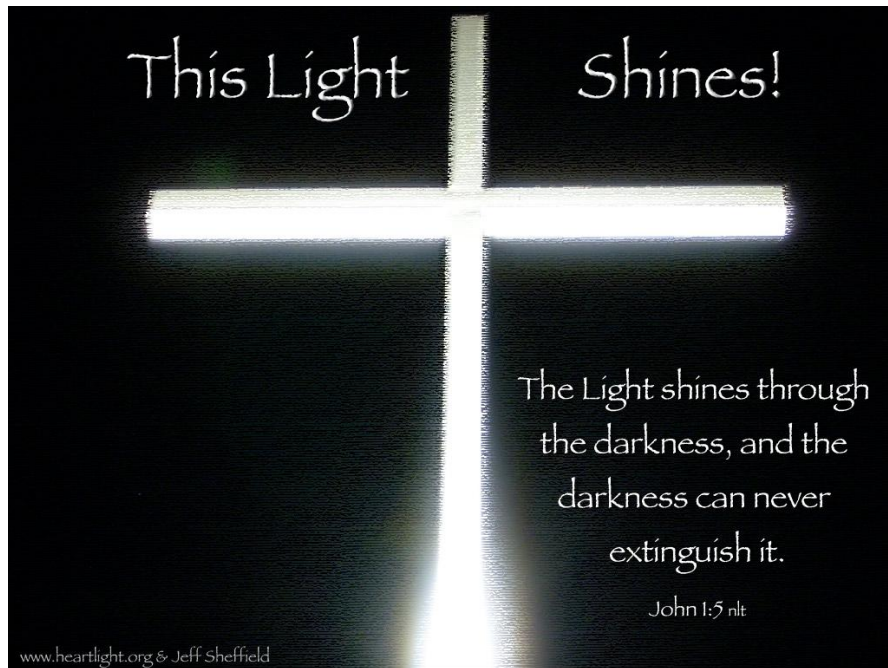
He spoke his word in relationships with a disenfranchised people; people left out of their society's idea of salvation and heaven. Where's people's existence was dark and distressed, Jesus brought light and hope.

He didn't come to Kings, Queens, Judges, Bishops and Priests. He didn't come to society's rulers and elect. He came to people like you and me. And he gave us life; life that was real and meaningful. He gave us light. He showed us how to light that passion for life that had grown dreary. He showed us how to love rather than fight for survival or position. He changed the world. He was light to the world.



And he showed us how to live in that light rather than in darkness; that there was a light inside of us that needed to be nurtured and to shine; that once ignited could not be extinguished. He taught us to believe and to hope, to identify not with the world that we lived in but with him, the word of God that existed from the beginning. We are not made in the world; we are made out of him. That is the real life. We are children of God, not of the

world; children of light, not of the flesh; children of hope, not of conditioning.



By believing in Jesus, the Christ, and receiving him and what he offers into our lives, we become who and what we, in essence, are. We have light, hope, freedom, and opportunity . . . we become fully alive; alive in the spirit . . . we have power to affect life for the better; to change the world for the good.

Christmas day, is about Christ being born, but ultimately, as we believe in him and receive him into our lives, it is about us being born as children of God.

